



NEWS

from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

February 14, 1997

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**FIRST FOUR AWARDS IN \$6 MILLION HCP LAND ACQUISITION PROGRAM
ARE ANNOUNCED FOR CALIFORNIA, FLORIDA, TEXAS, AND UTAH**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has awarded \$2.7 million to California, Texas, Florida and Utah under the first pilot program to help states acquire lands that support habitat conservation plans (HCPs), Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt announced today.

Allocations of \$1 million will go to Texas, \$750,000 to Utah, and \$500,000 each to California and Florida. The remainder of the \$6 million HCP Land Acquisition Fund is "already spoken for," Babbitt said. Those awards will be announced later.

"I'm always delighted when we can improve on a success story," said Babbitt, "and that's what this pilot program is about. When this Administration took office, we had 14 working HCPs on the books. Today, there are 197, with 200 more in the development stage. The conservation plans today are enjoying tremendous acceptance by states, the business community, and private landowners all across the country. They clearly demonstrate how well the public and private sectors can work together. These plans are a model for conservation and open space planning for the future."

HCPs are voluntary agreements drawn up by private landowners and local or state agencies, if applicable, which enable a given project to go forward on land utilized by endangered or threatened species, as long as the project minimizes and mitigates the impact to these species. The plan further acknowledges that some individuals of a species may be lost "in the pursuit of otherwise lawful activities," but ensures that the greater population will benefit.

The HCPs involved in today's announcement include:

Balcones Canyonlands Conservation Plan (Texas): \$1 million. The BCCP is a regional HCP that protects 35 listed and candidate species, including the golden-cheeked warbler, black-capped vireo and six invertebrates, among others, in western Travis County, Texas.

Washington County HCP (Utah): \$750,000. The Washington County HCP covers 34 listed and candidate species, including the desert tortoise, peregrine falcon and the American bald eagle.

Orange County Coastal Central HCP (California): \$500,000. Covers the gnatcatcher, peregrine falcon, southwestern willow flycatcher, and 34 other rare species.

Volusia County HCP (Florida): \$500,000. This Florida county plan protects nesting sea turtles.

The pilot program, established under Section 6 of the Endangered Species Act, provides that money may be obligated to appropriate state agencies but the funds must be used for specific land acquisitions that support HCPs where either states or territories are involved as partners. The funds do not supplant private sector or local government responsibilities required for mitigation during the implementation of HCPs.